Ningpo, January 1st 1847.

The providence of God seems to mark the present period, as one of the most remarkable in the world's history. The eyes of the whole civilized world are turned with expectation to the future. The current of passing events is apparently carrying us rapidly onward to some wonderful consummation; and the christian philanthropist, and infidel philosopher, alike await the result with the deepest interest. A revolution is going forward among men, which differs, both in its nature and its extent, from all that have before occurred. It relates to great principles; and in its extent, it embraces well nigh the whole family of man. It is felt in every country in Europe; and is carrying the states of the New World to a destiny which we dare not anticipate. In the Mohammedan states of Western Asia, events are developing a state of things which must lead ere long to important results. In central Asia the eyes of the world are fixed upon the progress of the British Empire in India, and the results to which it will lead. Even the barbarous tribes of distant islands are beginning to be brought within the sphere of new influences, and to rank themselves as nations. In the midst of political changes every where in progress, another power is at work with which these changes are closely connected. It is the gospel of Christ. While the world is engaged in a threefold struggle, for despotism, for liberty, or for agrarian anarchy, the gospel is operating silently but mightily upon the minds and the hearts of men; and the struggle which has ever been waged between the powers of light and of darkness, begins to assume a form which indicates a more desperate and vigorous contest, than the world has yet witnessed.

It is a matter of deep interest, that just at this epoch China should be brought into the struggle. The set time, appointed in the counsels of eternity, having arrived, He who is Head over all things to the church, overthrew the barriers by which China had hoped to protect herself from external influences, and opened the way for the entrance of the heralds of salvation. At the same time, a state of things is found to exist within her own borders, from which it may be presumed that the course of events which commenced with the war with England, will result in some wonderful, though perhaps gradual revolution. At all events, China, with her hundreds of millions, has been brought within reach of the mighty influences which agitate the nations of the West, and when these influences begin to be felt, this unwieldy, overgrown empire, weak, decrepid, and wrinkled with age, must be shaken in all its members. Thus China too has at length, among the last, though the oldest, taken her place in the ranks of the nations, and will henceforward march hand in hand with them to fulfill their respective destinies.

But it is not as a field of political strife, that the eye of the christian is now directed to China. It is rather as a field for the triumphs of redeeming grace—as a wide and open door to which the Lord is directing his people, commanding them to enter, and proclaim "peace on earth, good will to men." In this view only we propose to consider it.

When the armies of Israel went forth against their enemies, their numbers were sometimes diminished by the express command of God, and a large portion of the fighting men were sent back to their homes, or left where they could take no part in the battle. They could not therefore take to themselves the glory of victory, as though they had achieved it by their own courage and strength. Thus it is in the great spiritual struggle in which the Lord's people are now engaged. A mighty work is to be accomplished among the heathen, in which the church is to be instrumental. It must be made evident, however, that she is but an instrument—that by her own strength she can do nothing. The means employed therefore exhibit a striking disproportion to the results to be effected—a disproportion so great as to excite the contempt of the world. The labourers are few. A small and feeble band is sent to attack a countless host. But even of this small company, the numbers are diminished every year by premature death, or by the attacks of disease. Thus the world will be taught, and the church will be made to feel, that it is God alone that can effect the result. The history of Protestant missions in China, as elsewhere, afford abundant illustrations of these remarks. During the past year, as in previous years, some of those who had entered upon a course of labours for the welfare of China, have been called to their rest, while others have been compelled for a season to leave the field. Of those who have, during the past two years, returned to their native lands in search of health, many hope speedily to resume their work, and some have already arrived in China.

We give a brief view of the present state of the different stations, so far as our information enables us to do so.

The labourers at Canton are the Rev. E. C. Bridgman, D. D. and Mrs. Bridgman, Rev. P. Parker, M. D. and Mrs. Parker, Rev. Dyer Ball, and Mrs. Ball, the Rev. J. G. Bridgman, Mr. S. W. Williams, and Mr. S. W. Bonney of the A. B. C. F. M., and the Rev. W. Dean, Rev. I. J. Roberts, Rev. T. T. Devan, M. D. and the Rev. J. L. Shuck, of the American Baptist Board. Messrs. Shuck and Williams are at present temporarily absent in the U. S., but expect soon to return. Messrs. Dean and Devan are about to remove to Hong Kong. Mrs. Devan was suddenly removed from the field of her earthly labours, in October, two years after her arrival in China. Mr. Dean arrived at Canton in October, after an absence of about two years in the U. States. He was accompanied by the Rev. Messrs S. C. Clopton, George Pearcy and E. N. Jenks, with their wives, all of the Am. Baptist Board. Mr. and Mrs. Jenks will labour among the Chinese in Siam.

In Hong Kong are stationed the Rev. Jas. Gillespie and the Rev. J. F. Cleland, of the London Missionary Society. Mr. Cleland has charge of a press and font of metallic type, which has recently been removed from Singapore. The Rev. Jas. Legge, D. D. and Mrs. Legge, and B. Hobson, M. B., of the same Society, are at present on a visit to England. Dr. Hobson was bereaved of his wife when on the eve of landing in England.

The Rev. S. R. Brown, who has had charge of the flourishing school of the Morrison Education Society, has returned to the U. S. on account of the ill health of Mrs. Brown, leaving the school in charge of Mr. William A. Macy.

At Macao there is a boarding school of about twenty boys, under the care of the Rev. A. P. Happer of the Am. Presbyterian Board. A reinforcement, consisting of the Rev. J. B. French, and the Rev. Wm. Speer and Mrs. Speer, has recently been sent to this mission from the U. States.

At Amoy, in connection with the A. B. C. F. M. are the Rev. W. J. Pohlman, and the Rev. E. Doty. The latter is at present absent in the U. S., but is expected to return very soon with a reinforcement of several missionaries. W. H. Cumming, M. D. is not connected with any missionary society. The London Missionary Society supports the Rev. John Stronach, the Rev. Alex. Stronach and Mrs. Stronach, Mr. W. Young and Mrs. Young.—The Rev. John Lloyd and the Rev. H. A. Brown are supported by the B. F. M. P. C., and J. C. Hepburn, M. D., of that Board, with Mrs. Hepburn, is temporarily absent in the U. States. Mr. and Mrs. Young have also left the field for a time, and may be compelled to visit England.

At Shanghae are stationed the Rev. W. H. Medhurst, D. D. the Rev. William Milne, W. Lockhart, physician, and their families, supported by the London Missionary Society—the Rev. T. M'Clatchie and Mrs. M'Clatchie, by the English Church Missionary Society—and the Rt. Rev. Bishop Boone, the Rev. R. Graham, the Rev. J. Syle, and their families, with Misses M. J. Morse and E. G. Jones, by the Am. Episcopal Board. Dr. Medhurst has erected a chapel, in which he preaches on the Sabbath to large audiences. Dr. Lockhart's facilities for alleviating the sufferings of the diseased, have been increased by the erection of a building suitable for an hospital.

At Ningpo, the English Baptist Society supports the Rev. T.

H. Hudson and the Rev. Wm. Jarrom. D. J. Macgowan M. D. and Mrs. Macgowan are supported by the Am. Baptist Board. A girls school of about twenty pupils is sustained by Miss Aldersey, an English lady not connected with any society. The school has overcome many obstacles, and is gradually gaining in the confidence of the people.

The missionaries of the B. F. M. P. C. are the Rev. R. Q. Way and Mrs. Way, the Rev. W. M. Lowrie, Rev. A. W. Loomis and Mrs. Loomis, Rev. M. S. Culbertson and Mrs. Culbertson, D. B. McCartee M. D., and R. Cole, printer, and Mrs. Cole. Mr. Loomis returned to this station from Chusan when that island was restored to the Chinese. It is expected that the Rev. John Quarterman, who has been appointed to this station, will reach his field early in the ensuing spring. The school in connection with this mission contains thirty boys. A female school has recently been commenced, under the care of Mrs. Cole. A young man, a native of Ningpo, has lately been baptized, and admitted to the communion of the church in connection with this mission. The truth seems to have made some impression upon the minds of several others, who it is hoped will yet approve themselves sincere believers.

The friends of missions will rejoice to learn that the gospel is about to be preached to the inhabitants of the Loo Chew islands. Dr. Bettelhein, a converted Jew, with his family, sailed from Hong Kong during the summer to commence his lonely labours among this interesting people. The few vessels that have visited the islands represent the inhabitants as mild and peaceful.

Protestant missions in China, are yet in their infancy. Few of the missionaries enumerated above, have yet been on the ground long enough to accomplish any thing more than that preparatory schooling in the knowledge of the language and the people, which must constitute the foundation of successful labours; and even in this preparatory work, the greater part are but beginners. Although in one sense it is true that the fields are white to the harvest, it is equally true in another, that the seeding time is hardly arrived; the breaking up of the fallow ground is scarcely yet completed. Those however who have prayed for the millions of this populous empire, will thank God that he has at length brought into its territory so large a body of men, who are making those acquisitions which will fit them to enter the wide doors of usefulness, every where opening around them. Already a beginning has been made in the public preaching of the word. In all the ports thrown open by the late treaties to which missionaries have been sent, the gospel is now regularly and publicly proclaimed. It is a further ground for thankfulness, that those for whom a way has been opened by scenes of war and carnage, and the terror of foreign invasion, have in general been received with so much favour by the people. Although in the city of Canton the old hatred and contempt of foreigners, which has been gaining strength for two centuries, continues with all its bitterness, in the northern ports the popular feeling partakes but little of this rancour; and the missionary may pursue his labours, secure both from violence and insult.

The topic of greatest interest to the missionary, and the friends of missions, is the religion of the people. To delineate this would of course require volumes. We shall but attempt to throw together, in what follows, a few of the most prominent features of the religious feeling generally prevalent.

It has been common to rank the followers of Confucius as a religious sect. Confucius however was a religious teacher no further than the science of ethics is connected with religion. He exhorted to the practice of virtue, and taught a moral code of a purity which must command admiration; but his instructions related chiefly to the science of political economy. He did not extend his researches to those subjects which are connected with our relation to deity, nor to our state beyond the present life.

Laou tsze, the founder of the Taouist sect, was a contemporary of Confucius. His doctrine differed from that of the great philosopher in the distinctness and fullness with which he spake of spirits. As it fell in more with the felt necessities of our nature, it obtained numerous adherents. At present however the temples of this sect are not numerous, and its priests, as compared with the Buddhists, are few in number.

The religion of Buddha seems to have reached the Chinese heart to a greater extent than any other. It may be because Buddha is supposed to be able to confer greater benefits than the gods of the other sect; or more probably because Buddhism addresses itself more directly to the religious feelings of the people, looking more beyond the present life, and promising both present blessings and future happiness. The temples of this sect are found in every street and every village: they adorn every romantic valley, and form a part of the scene in almost every landscape. The priests, distinguished by the cut of their robes, and by the head being shaven entirely bare, are also very numerous; and being mere idle drones, are a great tax upon the community. This sect was introduced into China in the first century of the Christian era.

These sects may be considered as forming the basis of the religion of China; but the impression which their creeds have made respectively upon the popular mind is not distinctly marked. There are Buddhist priests, and priests of Taou, but the people do not by any means rank themselves under them as leaders. They do not write themselves Buddhists, or Taouists, or Confucianists, for these distinctions are regarded as matters with which the common people have nothing to do. Among those who can boast of a literary degree, there are some indeed who affect to laugh at the absurdities of the popular belief, but in general the doctrines of all the sects, in whole or in part, are received as equally worthy of belief. Even when they are denied or ridiculed, they commonly exert their influence upon the mind, and mould its religious conceptions so far as it has any. The learning of the learned is not of a kind to elevate them above the influence of absurdities so generally received by the multitudes around them. The intense darkness which broods over the intellect of China, is not relieved even by the glimmerings which might be reflected from a few minds enlightened by science and philosophy. The prince upon his throne, and the beggar in his rags, are shrouded in a darkness differing but by a few degrees in intensity. It is the darkness of Egypt, which envelopes alike the palace and the cottage.

There is no written standard of religious belief in China to fix the popular creed. The Taouist and Buddhist priests—especially the latter—understand but little even of their own religious books, and others of course are ignorant of their contents. The vulgar superstitions float at random upon the popular mind, and are handed down by tradition from generation to generation. The writings of the philosophers treat to some extent of the principles of morality, but their religion, if it may be called such, embraces only the present life. As to the great problems of human existence and human destiny—the end for which we were brought into being, and the future state which awaits us—they are silent. The foundation of their system is the original purity, and the perfectibility, of human nature. The highest virtue is attainable by the unassisted efforts of the moral faculties; and the attainment is urged only because it secures present happiness. If there be any regard to the favour of Heaven, or the Supreme Ruler, it has reference to that favour chiefly, if not entirely, as experienced in this world. The foundation of this morality is humanity, not deity. Humanity therefore is exalted into deity. This principle extends through all grades of society. That most men sometimes do wrong cannot be denied, but the depravity of our nature is an idea so opposed to all the notions of the Chinese, that it cannot be even understood. Few will admit their own hearts to be wicked. The aged will commonly acknowledge that in youth they have committed indiscretions, but an appeal to a white beard is considered a sufficient guarantee that the heart is pure from sin. The necessity of an atonement therefore is not dreamed of, and the doctrine will of course be received with contempt.

The worship of ancestors, which indeed is made almost the whole of religion, is but a deification of human nature. The same principle may perhaps account in part for the very general prevalence of hero worship, and the great number of deified men. Of the numerous temples which meet the eye in every direction, a large proportion consists of those which have been erected by families or individuals in honour of their own immediate ancestors, or by the people of the district, in honour of men who for eminent services to the country have been elevated to the rank of gods. These temples are but little frequented, and are commonly closed except on the special occasions on which the god receives his appointed honours. An instance of such a deification is of recent occurrence. The streets of Shanghae are now adorned by a temple, dedicated to the worship of a distinguished commander, who fell near that city, in an engagement with the English troops, during the late war. It is a little singular that while countless names of lesser note are honoured with the title of deity, Confucius is never spoken of as such, though in every district a temple is erected to his memory.

The gods of the Chinese pantheon for the most part bear a *national* character. But a small part can be considered as the exclusive property of either of the religious sects. Every district has its gods of the land and grain, of the hills and valleys, of the springs and fountains of water; and every city, its tutelar deity, known as "the god of the city wall and ditch." The prominent objects in nature, are regarded as proper objects of worship. It is no uncommon sight to see an aged man placing a stick of burning incense at the door of his dwelling, and then bow reverently toward the four points of the compass, in worship of the material heavens, and the earth. A generally prevalent notion is, that if a man is faithful in the worship of the Chinese trinity, of Heaven, Earth, and Ancestors, it is not of much importance whether he worship any other god or not. In ordinary conversation, the sun and the moon are commonly spoken of as Ta Yang poussa, and Ta Ying poussa—or the great male and female deities. At the period of the winter solstice, there is a general thanksgiving in each family, to the god of Fire, for the preservation from the ravages of the terrible element during the year. An expression of thanks, printed on a slip of paper, is pasted over the door of each house for several days. The god of Thunder is feared on account of his powers of destruction, and is supposed to visit merited vengeance upon those, who, having been guilty of high crimes, have been able to escape punishment from men. Thus as in every land where man has been left to grope in the dimness of the light of nature, God is forgotten, and the creature is honoured more than the creator.

But the god who of all others is most worshipped in China, as every where else, is *Mammon.* The Chinese are emphatically a worldly people. To the world they give the real homage of their hearts. They live *avowedly* for the present life. What is to be their state after death they know not, nor do they care. The doctrine of the metempsychosis is very commonly received, but there are few, if any, who entertain any fixed or definite views. It is a prevalent notion that man is possessed of three souls, of which at death one enters the place of departed spirits, another enters the tomb with the body, and the third remains with the tablet of the deceased which is worshipped. Accordingly when a death takes place at a distance from the family, priests are employed to call back the wandering spirit to the family abode, and the tablet of the dead. Yet there is a general belief in some kind of future rewards and punishments, and when a death occurs, priests are almost always called in to offer prayers for the soul of the departed. If the certainty concerning those things which lie beyond the grave, which is enjoyed by those who live under the light of revelation, fails in so many instances to arouse the heart from its natural apathy and indifference, we can not look for any thing better among those whose views are shrouded in obscurity and uncertainty. Occasionally indeed, some are found among the more aged, who, as they become sensible of their declining strength, manifest some solicitude to secure happiness after death; but in general the approach of death is regarded with utter indifference. It is not surprising therefore, that the crime of suicide should prevail, as it does, to a fearful extent. There is nothing to restrain from its commission but the natural love of life. When trials and hardships render life a burden; or when anger, or despair, takes possession of the mind; or even when a family brawl, or harassing creditors, or impending disgrace, cast a cloud over the pathway of life, death is readily embraced as a protecting friend. The instrument of self-destruction, in almost all cases, is the poisonous drug which is gnawing upon the vitals of China herself. Opium secures an easy and a bloodless death, and those who would not have courage to resort to more violent means, gladly avail themselves of its aid, to rid themselves of the sorrows of life.

From this brief and very imperfect sketch, it will be seen that there is very little religious feeling among the people, that deserves the name. The christian cannot but rejoice, that the idolatry of so large a portion of the human family, is, to so great a degree, free from the most abominable features which have characterized it in almost every other pagan land. Yet the nation is as deeply sunk in error—as effectually shut out from the light of life—as certainly sinking down to eternal death, as though they were barbarians of the most savage mould. Feeble indeed are the instruments, to whom it has been committed in trust, to bring to them that gospel which has brought life and immortality to light, and long they may labour, to all appearance, in vain. But they shall not spend their strength for nought. The God who has sent us forth, is the same God who said—"Let there be light;" and there was light. When that command goes forth which shall illuminate the Chinese mind by the rays of the Sun of Righteousness, then the Lord's elect shall be gathered in—a nation shall be born in a day, and China will bow the knee to Jesus. The word of the Lord must accomplish that whereunto he has sent it. It cannot return unto him void.

In behalf of the missionaries
of the B. F. M. P. C.
M. S. Culbertson.

To the
Cor. Sec. Soc. Inquiry
Theo. Seminary
Princeton
N. J.

Circular Letter
from Ningpo
China.
Jan. 1. 1847.

Circular Letter from
Ningpo-China
Jan 1 1847

To the
Cor. Secretary of the Society of Inquiry
Theo. Seminary
Princeton
N.J.
U.S.A.

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